

# DEPARTMENT of the INTERIOR

## news release

OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY

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For Release February 22, 1973

### INTERIOR DEPARTMENT ACCEPTS LAND DONATION FOR DISMAL SWAMP REFUGE

Under Secretary of the Interior John C. Whitaker today accepted control over more than 49,000 acres of the Great Dismal Swamp in Virginia for a new national wildlife refuge -- the largest single land donation ever made to the Government for wildlife conservation.

Dr. Whitaker, acting on behalf of Secretary Rogers C. B. Morton, received legal papers covering the transaction from top officials of the Union Camp Corporation, owner of the historic property for more than 60 years, and The Nature Conservancy, national land preservation organization which served as an unpaid middleman. The gift has an appraised value of \$12.6 million.

The Union Camp property comprises more than 70 square miles of heavily forested land, much of it once owned by George Washington, Patrick Henry and other prominent Virginians. It represents about 20 percent of the Swamp's total remaining acreage, and about half of the Swamp in Virginia; the remaining 60 percent of the Swamp is in neighboring North Carolina. The Swamp, overall, is less than one-third of its original size, owing to agricultural and residential development.

"To be able to receive a gift of this magnitude on behalf of the American people is a rare occurrence," Under Secretary Whitaker said at the ceremony at the Interior Department. "I can only hope this example set by the Union Camp Corporation will inspire other companies to follow suit, because the future of wildlife and wild lands in the United States is so closely tied to what owners of private land decide to do with their holdings."

Union Camp's board chairman, Alexander Calder, Jr., conveyed a 40 percent interest in the company's property to Everett M. Woodman, president of The Nature Conservancy, who immediately turned it over to the Interior Under Secretary. The company will make subsequent donations of its remaining interest in the land in 1974 and 1975 until the transaction is completed. Under U.S. tax laws, the company receives a deduction of the donated land's appraised value from taxable earnings over a period of several years. No significant timber harvesting has occurred on the property during the past quarter of a century.

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In his remarks at the ceremony, the Under Secretary cited the Nixon Administration's commitment to a better environment for all Americans, and cited progress achieved during the past four years.

Secretary Morton, in a message to participants at the ceremony, said, "President Nixon has consistently challenged the American people to take personal responsibility for the preservation of our natural heritage and the quality of our environment. As he has repeatedly said, the job to be done requires the best efforts of government at all levels, and participation by every citizen.... The ceremony today demonstrates exactly the kind of private, voluntary action the President has called for. I salute Union Camp and The Nature Conservancy, and I pledge our utmost efforts to conserve this outstanding natural resource."

Situated within a few minutes' drive southwest of a major population center -- the thriving Norfolk-Hampton Roads port and industrial complex -- the Dismal Swamp contains forms of plant and animal life seldom seen elsewhere. For some it is the northern end of their range; a unique native species is the Dismal Swamp short-tailed shrew. Seventy-five species of birds nest in the Swamp, and one of the last native breeding populations of black bears in the East is there. Insects, fishes, frogs, mammals and a varied assortment of plants combine in a unique community.

At the heart of the Swamp, on the property being conveyed by Union Camp, is Lake Drummond, covering nearly 3,000 acres and roughly circular in shape. Its average maximum depth is only six feet, but these unusually pure waters are essential to the Swamp ecosystems.

Dr. Whitaker said the Interior Department, managing this new property through its Fish and Wildlife Service, will have as its prime objective the preservation and enhancement of natural values. "All management programs will be conducted to support this purpose and must be consistent with it," he said.

Although it is impossible to restore the Swamp to its pristine state, Dr. Whitaker said, the essentially natural character of the Swamp will be the basis for a detailed management plan to be developed within the next 18 months. Perhaps the highest priority will be assigned to how best to manage the area's waters, especially Lake Drummond.

Like all new refuges, the Dismal Swamp National Wildlife Refuge henceforth is closed to public uses until specifically opened to those uses, the Under Secretary emphasized. He said consideration would be given to limited hunting and fishing which would be consistent with the purpose of the refuge system. But existing cabin sites and hunt club facilities in the refuge will be terminated, since Federal law prohibits exclusive private use of any lands within national wildlife refuges.

Scientific investigations, environmental education, and means for interpretation of the natural scene will be encouraged. Off-road vehicles will be prohibited, but some boating for recreation probably will be permitted when the management plan is complete.

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